A

SERMON

Preached before the

King & Queen,

AT

WHITE-HALL,

The *Fifth of November*, 1692.

Kidder

By *RICHARD*, Lord Bishop of BATH and WELLS.

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Fifth 2 SAM. XXIV. V. 14 Sermon

And David ſaid unto Gad, I am in a great ſtrait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD (for his mercies are great) and let me not fall into the hands of man.

DAVID was moved by *Satan*, not to ſay by his own Ambition, to Number the People of *Iſrael*. He gives this Matter in Charge to *Joab*, nor will he be diverted from it. The People are Numbred, and the Account of their Number returned. *David*'s Heart ſmote him, he is ſenſible of his Sin, and deprecates God's Diſpleaſure. Upon this the Prophet *Gad* is ſent to *David* with a Meſſage, and a ſad one it is: He hath his Option indeed out of Three great Evils; either Seven Years Famine, or Three Months Flight before his Enemies, or Three Days Peſtilence in his Land: Upon this Meſſage *David* ſaid unto *Gad*, *I am in a great ſtrait*, &c.

I humbly crave leave in the way to my Text, to clear the foregoing Hiſtory from ſome Diffi-

culties

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culties which attend upon it, eſpecially as it is with ſome variety related in this Chapter, and in the Book of *Chronicles*.

Firſt, It may be demanded, Where lay the Sin of *David* in Numbring the People?

Secondly, If there were a Sin in *David*, yet with what Juſtice could the People be puniſhed for it?

Thirdly, If this were a Sin in *David*, how can it be ſaid that God moved him to it?

Fourthly, What Account can be given of the different Numbers related here, and in the Book of *Chronicles*? Here the Number of the Men of *Iſrael* is ſaid to amount to Eight hundred thouſand, but there we have a Number that exceeds this by Three hundred thouſand. Here the Men of *Judah* are ſaid to be Five hundred thouſand, there the Number comes ſhort by Thirty thouſand.

Fifthly, What Account can be given of the Difference as to the Time of the Famine: One place mentions a Famine of *Seven*, the other only of *Three* Years.

There are too many, who from ſuch Difficulties take occaſion to cry down the Inſpiration and

and Authority of the Holy Writ; and the *Jews* declaim againſt the Evangeliſts with leſs pretence.

I. Where lay the Sin of *David* in Numbring the People? Is it any where forbidden in the Law of *Moſes*?

I anſwer,

1. That it is evident that *David* ſinned. We read that his *Heart ſmote him*, and he ſaid, I have *ſinned greatly in what I have done*, (v. 10.) *Joab* diſſwaded him from it, as that which would be a *cauſe of treſpaſs to Iſrael.* Beſides, the Sin is puniſhed with a devouring Peſtilence. 1 Chron. 21. 3.

2. That we are not obliged to believe, that the bare Numbring the People was all the fault that *David* was guilty of For thô his Numbring the People can hardly be juſtified without a ſufficient Reaſon, or ſpecial Direction, yet we need not lay all his Sin upon his meer Numbring them.

God had promiſed to *Abraham*, That his Seed ſhould be as the *Stars of Heaven*, numberleſs as they: 'Tis elſewhere ſaid to him, *I will multiply thy Seed exceedingly, that it ſhall not be numbred for multitude.* And *Jacob* ſays expreſly unto Gen. 15. 5. 16. 10.

Gen. 32. 12. Numb. 23. 10. God, *Thou ſaidſt I will ſurely do thee good, and make thy ſeed as the ſand of the ſea, which cannot be numbred for multitude*; and *Balaam* from this *Idea* ſaid, *Who can count the duſt of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Iſrael?*

Maimon. H. Tamid & Muſaph. c. 4. Raſhi & Kimch. in Sam. 15. 4. Toma, c. 2. n. 1. cum Cheringham.

The *Jewiſh* Doctors teach, That it was not lawful to Number the *Iſraelites* by their *Polls*. That whenever their Number was to be taken, it was to be taken not by their *Polls*, but by ſomething elſe, *e. g.* by taking the Number of the Paſchal Lambs, or Half-ſhekels, or ſome other things from which their Number might be collected; for which they ground themſelves on 1 *Sam.* 15. 4. with *chap.* 11. *v.* 8.

Numb. 1. & 6.

'Tis true indeed, that *Moſes* in the Wilderneſs did ſeveral times Number the *Iſraelites*; but 'tis as true, that he did it by direction from God, and for wiſe and great Ends, not here to be inſiſted upon. But *David* had no Warrant here to do it.

But whatever the bare Numbring of the People were, 'tis certain 'twas a Sin, when it was done from a faulty Principle, to a wrong End, or otherwiſe than it ought to be. This Action of *David*'s might be culpable upon the following Accounts.

Firſt,

Firſt, As it was an Argument of Pride and Ambition; 'twas *Peccatum Elationis*, ſays one of the Ancients. He did it (ſays another) *Ad metiendas imperii vires*. And the Puniſhment by the conſuming Peſtilence, which diminiſhed the Numbred, carried in it the Signature of the Sin of Boaſting of the Great Numbers of his People. Pride corrupts even a lawful Action.

Secondly, Sacriledge is another Sin that is ſaid to have attended upon this Action. *Joſephus*, when he relates this paſſage, tells us, That *David* forgot the Precept of *Moſes*, who upon Numbring the People, required the Payment of the Half-ſhekel; which was for the Uſe of the Sanctuary. He might have added, that this was required by *Moſes* under the Penalty of a Plague, which enſued here. The words of *Moſes* are expreſs: *When thou takeſt the ſumm of the Children of Iſrael, after their numbers, then ſhall they give every man a ranſome for his ſoul unto the Lord, when thou numbreſt them: That there be no* PLAGUE *amongſt them when thou numbreſt them* *David* takes the Number, but we hear nothing of God's Offering, and no wonder then that the Plague threatned ſhould ſucceed.

Antiq. l. 7. c. 13.

Exod. 30. 12, 13.

Thirdly,

Vid. *Bertram Lucubr. Frankatallenſ. c.2.*

Thirdly, Another Fault of *David's* is thought to be this, That he numbred thoſe who were under the Age of Twenty Years, and pryed farther into the Numbers of *Iſrael*, than God had permited him. The *Iſraelites* were numbred three times in the Wilderneſs; but Care was taken that they ſhould be numbred but from twenty Years old and upwards, when ever their Number was taken. This was expreſly provided for in the Law of *Moſes*; under that Age they might not be numbred; and that *becauſe the Lord had ſaid, he would increaſe Iſrael like to the ſtars of the heavens.* 'Tis ſaid indeed that *David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under.* But it follows that *Joab began to number* (*i. e.* to number from twenty Years old, and under, as has been thought) but indeed he *finiſhed not, becauſe there fell wrath for it*; And hence (as it follows) it was this Account or Number was not taken into the Publick Commentaries or Chronicles.

Exod. 38.26. Numb. 1. 3. 26. 2. Exod. 20.14.

1 Chron. 27. 23, 24.

II. If *David* ſinned in numbring the People, yet how could it conſiſt with Juſtice to puniſh the People for it it?

To

To this I anſwer,

1. That it is no Injuſtice to puniſh a wicked People, whatever occaſion God takes to do it. There's no Force in this Objection, unleſs we can ſuppoſe the People innocent. God deſign'd to puniſh *Iſrael.* He was juſtly diſpleaſed with them. The Peoples Sins are many times the cauſe of the Miſcarriage of their Kings. 2 Sam. 24. 1.

2. 'Tis certain that this People deſerved this Severity. They had been guilty in the Revolt of *Sheba*; they were not what they ſhould be after the Diſcipline of three Years Famine; they paid not their Ranſom when they were numbred, and yet that Omiſſion was threatned with a Plague by *Moſes.* 2 Sam. 20.

III. If *David* ſinned, yet how can it be ſaid that God moved him to it? *v.* 1.

I anſwer,

1. That it is expreſly ſaid in a parallel place, that *Satan ſtood up againſt Iſrael, and provoked David to number Iſrael?* 'Twas that evil One that tempted to this Sin. God cannot be tempted to evil, nor does he tempt any Man. 1 Chron. 21. 1.

2. Such

2. Such is the Expreſſion (*v.* 1.) that there is no reaſon to impute the Evil to God; but in the parallel place 'tis expreſly imputed to Satan. 'Tis ſaid indeed (*v.* 1.) that *he moved David againſt them*, as we render it. But 'tis well known that ſuch an Expreſſion imports no more, but that *David* was moved: 'Tis very common in the Holy Writ, that an Active Verb without a Perſon is to be taken paſſively. And that is the caſe here. And there are many ſuch in the Scriptures.

'The well obſerving this way of ſpeaking will 'remove the Difficulty of ſeveral Texts of the 'Holy Scriptnres, where there are a great num-'ber of places thus to be explained. *v. g. They 'could not believe becauſe that Eſaias ſaid again, 'he hath blinded their eyes, and hath hardened 'their hearts.* John xii. 39, 40. We muſt not 'think the *Jews* Unbelief is here imputed to 'God, as the cauſe of it. For as 'tis not ſo 'imputed by the Prophet (*Eſai.* vi. 9.) nor in 'the Quotation of that place as it lies in St. '*Matthew*, (*ch.* xiii. 14, 15.) nor in the *Syriac* 'Verſion of this place, ſo it ought not by our 'Interpreters: For it imports no more but this, 'that their Eyes were blinded, and their hearts 'hardened. Thus we read, *He hardened Pha-*

'*raoh's*

'*raoh's heart* (*Exod.* vii. 13.) nothing more is 'meant but this, That *Pharaoh*'s heart was 'hardened. So the *Vulgar* and *Chaldee* render 'it, and ſo the *Hebrew* is rendred by our *Eng-'liſh* v. 22. There is no Perſon mentioned in 'one place or in the other: And in the next 'Chapter it is expreſly ſaid, that *Pharaoh hard-'ened his heart at this time alſo*; which words 'impute his foregoing hardneſs to himſelf. All 'that can be meant by it, is that his Heart was 'hardened. And for the other place what is ren-'dered in St. *John* (*Chap.* xii. 40.) *He hath 'blinded*, &c. is thus expreſſed in another place: 'The heart of *this people is waxed groſs, and their 'eyes have they cloſed*, Acts xxviii 27. This is 'a common way of ſpeaking with the holy Wri-'ters, *Make to your ſelves friends of the Mammon 'of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye fail* THEY 'MAY RECEIVE *you*, *i. e.* That ye may 'be received (*Luk.* xvi. 9.) Again, *This night 'do they require thy ſoul.* (So the *Greek* imports, 'and ſo is our Marginal Reading.) *i. e.* Thy 'Soul ſhall be required, *Luk.* xii. 20. I might 'add other places, as *Luk.* xiv. 35. With *Matt.* 'v. 13. And *Iſai.* ix. 9. And the true Sence 'of what is rendred, *He moved David*, imports 'no more than this, that *David was moved.*

VI. What Account can be given of the different Numbers reported here, and in the Book of *Chronicles*? Here the Men of *Iſrael* amount to Eight hundred thouſand, the Number there exceeds this by Three hundred thouſand. Here the Men of *Judah* are Five hundred thouſand, there they come ſhort by Thirty thouſand.

I anſwer,

1. This Difference is fairly reconcileable from the different ways of taking theſe Numbers. The legal way was from Twenty Years old and upwards, the illegal (which *Joab* is ſuppoſed to have made uſe of) takes in ſome under that Age, and accordingly the whole Number muſt be more or leſs.

Abravenel in 2 Sam. 24.

2. There is another way of removing the Difficulty as to the different Number of the *Iſraelites*: That in the ſmaller Number *Benjamin* and *Levi* were not reckoned, but were in the greater. 'Tis ſaid of *Joab*, *Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: For the king's word was abominable to Joab*, *i. e.* in the Account which *Joab* gave in to *David*, and which is mentioned in *Samuel*, he had not reckoned *Benjamin* and *Levi*, *David*'s Command being grievous to him. And hence that Number falls ſhort of the other. For the

1 Chron. 21. 6.

the confirming hereof we ſhall find ground from the Text here, and in the Book of *Chronicles*. Here 'tis only ſaid, that there were in *Iſrael* Eight hundred thouſand: There 'tis ſaid, that *all Iſrael*, or, (as we render it) *all* they of *Iſrael* were a Thouſand thouſand, and an hundred thouſand Men. The one gives Account of *all Iſrael*, and the other excepts *Benjamin* and *Levi*. 2 Sam. 24. 9. *with* 1 Chron. 21. 5.

For the Difference as to the Men of *Judah*, 'tis the leſs or broken Number, and not ſo conſiderable. And 'tis poſſible that the Inhabitants of *Jeruſalem* are reckoned in one place and omitted in the other. 1 Chron. 21. 15.

V. What Account can be given of the Difference as to the time of the Famine? One place mentions a Famine of Seven, the other of Three Years. The lxxii have Three Years in this place. And that may ſeem more agreeable to the *three* Months Sword, and the *three* Years Peſtilence. Shall we now conclude the place corrupted?

I anſwer,

By no means. The Caſe I take to be this, There had been Three Years Famine already upon the Score of the *Gibeonites*. This Year in which the People were numbred, was the Fourth 2 Sam. 21.

Year from the beginning of that Famine, and being a Sabbatical Year could not remove it; Three Years forward added to these Four, make up Seven Years Famine: So then the Seven Years Famine in *Samuel*, take in the Three past and the present Year, and Three more to come; the Three in *Chronicles* are to be understood of the Three to come after this.

Abravenel in 2 Sam. 24. *J. Armachan, ad A. M.* 2987.

Having thus cleared my way I return to my Text, *And David said unto Gad*, &c.

In which Words we have an Account,

First, Of *David*'s great Strait, *And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait.*

Secondly, Of his Resolution or Choice, *Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord, and let me not fall into the hands of man.*

Thirdly, The Reason which he assigns, why he chose to fall into the Hands of the Lord, *For his mercies are great.* This also insinuates the Cruelty of Men, whose very tender Mercies are cruel.

I. We have an Account of *David*'s great Strait, *And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait*, it must needs be great, when these Evils are laid before him, and he is to choose Famine, Sword,

Sword, or Peſtilence: To this miſerable Caſe had his Sin reduced him. Here is

-----Plurima mortis imago.

Here's Death placed before him in ſeveral Shapes and Forms. The Famine is a *lingring* Death, the Sword is a *violent*, the Peſtilence a *ſudden* one.

II. We have *David*'s Reſolution and Choice, *Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord*, &c.

By the way there being three Evils propounded to him, Famine, Sword, and Peſtilence, *David* forthwith refuſeth Famine, and reduceth theſe Evils to two only. For beſides that his People had lain under a three Years Famine already, upon the ſcore of the *Gibeonites*, and that had not wrought a Cure upon them, there could be nothing expected from a ſeven Years Famine, but an utter Deſtruction of the People. Beſides, a Death by Sword or Peſtilence are more eligible than that by Famine. They that *be ſlain with the ſword, are better than they that be ſlain with hunger. For theſe pine away, ſtricken through for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have ſodden their own children, they were their meat in the deſtruction of the daughter of my people.* There is nothing ſo formidable as this kind of Death is to Mankind. Lament. 9, 10.

No

No wonder then that *David* reduced his Evils to two: The *Sword* of his *Enemies*, and the *Sword of the Lord*, as the Peſtilence is called in a parallel place. The latter of theſe is more immediately God's Hand. The Peſtilence is, Τὸ Θεῖον, a Divine Infliction, more peculiarly, and more immediately. Againſt this Evil there needs no Warlike Preparation, as againſt the Sword of the Enemy. Here's no room for any thing but Repentance and Tears, Prayers and Humiliations. This Enemy walketh in Darkneſs, and is not to be provided againſt as the Enemies Sword is. Beſides, the Enemies Sword might cut off, but not amend his People. Camps and Armies are ſeldom the Schools of Vertue, and Inducements to Repentance: And therefore *David* chooſeth this. *Let us fall*, &c.

Chron. 1. 12.

III. The reaſon which he aſſigns for this choice; *For his mercies are great*. This alſo inſinuates the Cruelty of Men, whoſe Mercies are many times cruel.

Joſephus, in relating this Matter, lets us underſtand the Charity of King *David* to his People in making this Choice. If he had choſen the Famine, he had choſen very ill for his poor Subjects, but well enough for himſelf. His own

own Riches and Store might have ſupplied him with Proviſions for himſelf, whilſt his poor Subjects had ſtarved. Had he choſen the Sword of his Enemies for three Months, his People might in that time have been cut off, but his own Perſon might have been ſecured by his Guards, or ſtrong Caſtles and Places of Retreat; but he chooſeth, Τὸ παθος κοινὸν ἐν βασιλευσι καὶ τοῖς ἀρχομένοις. *An Evil that is incident to Kings, and to Subjects.* And in this he was an admirable Pattern to the beſt of Kings and Governors, who are always moſt concerned for the Safety and Welfare of their People.

But I will not ſearch after any other Reaſons of *David*'s Choice; thô it were not difficult to aſſign many others. I will confine my ſelf to that which he gives in the Words of my Text, *For his mercies are great*; which, by the way, is the reaſon of his Choice, and of his Refuſal of the Sword of his Enemies, *Let me not fall into the hands of man*; where the Cruelty of Men is fairly inſinuated.

I might here entertain you with a large Account of the Cruelties of Men, and of the Mercies of God. *David* had great Experience of one, and of the other. He was perſecuted by *Saul* from time to time. His Merits, and his Affiinity,

Affinity, his Innocence and Great Atchievements were no Protection to him. He was very ſenſible of the Malice of *Doeg*, the Churliſhneſs of *Nabal*, che Injuries received from the *Amalekites* and *Philiſtines*. He met with great Rudeneſs from *Hanun*, an unnatural Rebellion from *Abſolom*, and bitter Curſes from *Shimei*. He therefore knew very well the Cruelty of Men, and and how little Mercy he could expect from his profeſſed and victorious Enemies. He met with hard Uſage from his Relatives, from thoſe whom he had ſerved, whom he had obliged, and preſerved. He might well ſay, *Let me not fall into the hands of man.*

We need not go far for Proof of the Cruelty of our Enemies: The Occaſion of our Meeting here this Day, lays before us an Example without any parallel. Here we have a Maſterpiece of the greateſt Treachery and Cruelty alſo, and that alſo without any juſt Provocation or Reaſon.

It was a Treachery and Perfidiouſneſs in the higheſt degree, a formed Deſign to blow up the King, and the Parliament, our Laws and Religion, our Rights and Libertites at a Blow. 'Twas a Treachery ſo black and ſo deteſtable that Heathens would have abhorred, and puniſhed

niſhed alſo. They would have ſcorned to have overcome their Enemies this way. So far were they from it, that they would have contemned and ſtigmatized the Traytor that offered them his aſſiſtance. In the War the *Romans* had with King *Pyrrhus*, one of that King's Subjects, (a Fugitive) offered *Fabricius*, to return to *Pyrrhus*, and kill him, if he would give him a Reward: He was ſo far from doing it, that he ſent the Traytor back to *Pyrrhus*, and the Senate approved what he did. They would not deliver themſelves from ſo powerful an Enemy by Treachery, nor put an end to that expenſive War, by encouraging a perfidious Traytor. An open Enemy we can provide againſt. Here we have notice, and are not ſurprized: But Fraud and Treachery walk in the Darkneſs, and deſtroy us as *Joab* did *Abner*, of whom *David* ſpeaks, ſaying, *Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters, as a man falleth before wicked men, ſo felleſt thou.* Such an Enemy is of all things the moſt deteſtable; and 'tis the Intereſt of all Mankind to combine againſt, and exterminate ſuch Serpents from the face of the Earth. Into ſuch hands as theſe, were we very near falling.

Cicero Offic. l. 3.

2 *Sam* 3. 34.

It was alſo Cruelty in the higheſt degree. Never was there a greater inſtance of Barbarity and Unmercifulneſs. Had it taken effect, who can expreſs the Effects of this one Blow? Who can reckon up the multitude of Mourners, that would in a moment have been made Widows and Fatherleſs! Who can expreſs the Confuſion and Miſeries that would have enſued! The Authors of this Deſign muſt have put off the *Chriſtian*, when they were engaged in the *Treachery*; and when in the *Cruelty*, the *Man* alſo. They muſt have loſt all Bowels, and become ἀνθρωποειδῆ θηρία, Wolves and Tygers in Humane Shape.

But that which enhanſes the Wickedneſs, is, that there was no Provocation to this Rage and Fury: Nothing could have juſtified ſo baſe a Practice; but here was no occaſion given. Theſe Men had been gently uſed, enjoyed their Properties, and were undiſturbed in their Poſſeſſions, and their Liberties.

By the way, I cannot but take notice, that theſe Practices ſpeak too plainly the faultineſs of their Principles. Theſe things are ſo far from commending their Belief, that they abundantly expoſe it. That Religion can never be from God, that inſpires Men with Fury and

and Ill-will. The worſt Cauſe is always moſt fierce and fell. *He that was born after the fleſh, perſecuted him that was born after the ſpirit.* Gal. 4. 29. Thus it hath always been, and thus it is now. The Wiſdom from above is not only pure, but peaceable, *&c.* Our Lord came not to kill, but to ſave. He would not call for Fire from Heaven, againſt Hereticks or Enemies. What greater proof can we have of a falſe Religion, than that it promotes Cruelty and Oppreſſion? Maſſacres and Murders, Treaſons and Rebellions, are none of the Notes of the Catholick Church of CHRIST. But I leave this unpleaſant Argument, and proceed to the more expreſs Reaſon of *David's* Choice. Let us fall now into the Hands of the LORD, *For his mercies are great.*

David had great Experience of this alſo. He had experimented this in the whole Courſe of his Life. God had delivered him from the hands of *Saul*, and of all his Enemies; He was delivered from the Lyon, and the Bear, from *Goliah*, and from very many, and very great Evils.

Well might *David* ſay, *His mercies are great.* We may all ſay ſo. This Day pro-

claims it: And we are all of us Witneſſes of this great Truth.

We cannot number the Mercies of GOD. They are more than we can expreſs; they encompaſs us on every ſide. *The Lord is good to*
Pſal. 145. 9. *all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*
36. 5, 6. *Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulneſs reacheth unto the clouds. ---O Lord,*
103. 8. *thou preſerveſt man and beaſt. The Lord is merciful and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

I am not ſo vain, as to attempt to lay all the Mercies of God before you, and to give you up the Particulars of them. 'Twill ſuffice at preſent, that I mind you of ſomething on this occaſion.

How great are his Mercies to our Souls! He hath given his Son, revealed his Will, promiſed his Spirit, and propounded for the Encouragement of us, Eternal Life. He gives us time to repent, beſeecheth us to be reconciled, and woo's and courts us to be happy.

His Laws are gentle, his Aſſiſtances at hand; he is ready to help our Obedience, and to reward it alſo.

He gives us Being, Life, and Motion, Health, and all the Comforts of Life.

He

He is ſlow to Anger, takes not Advantages againſt us, he is forward to help us, and does not willingly afflict the Children of Men, he is always prone to do us Kindneſſes, and very ſlow to Anger. This the *Hebrew* Doctors mean when they ſay, *That Michael flies but with one wing, Gabriel with two*; i. e. The Meſſenger of good Tidings (ſuch was *Gabriel*) is diſpatched away apace, but he that brings evil Tidings (as *Michael* does) is ſlow.

He ſpares us when we deſerve Puniſhment, he does not ſtrike when we provoke him, and when he does, he doth not ſtir up all his Wrath.

He hath often kept our Eyes from Tears, our Feet from Falling, and our Souls from Death.

He made us, and his watchful Eye hath preſerved us ever ſince, he hath preſerved us from the Grave, when we were within the Proſpect of Death and the Fears of Hell, he hath ſaved us upon the tempeſtuous Seas, and in the Day of Battel, and when our Father and Mother hath forſaken us, he hath taken us up.

He hath in our Trouble heard our humble Prayer, hath ſcattered our Fears, and been better to us than our Hopes.

Who

Who can reckon up the Mercies of Immunity that are owing to the Goodneſs of God altogether? That we are at Eaſe, not under Tortures of Gout or Stone, not under the Flames of Calentures; that we are not bereft of our Underſtanding, or Limbs; and innumerable other Mercies there are of this kind.

That our Friends live, and numberleſs Comforts of Light are continued to us, that we are alive this Day, and have great Hopes that we ſhall be happy in a better World.

We are Witneſſes that Gods Mercies are great: The whole Creation is likewiſe a Witneſs of it; there is nothing more evident and inconteſtable.

God is good to us, and his Mercies exceed all that we can ſay; he is kind to us at another rate than we are to one another; he is kind without a Motive, and notwithſtanding our Demerits: He ſeeks our Good and Happineſs, though he would be, and be happy, if we were not, or if we were, miſerable; his Kindneſs is moſt ſincere: It cannot be ſuſpected; we are dearer to him than we are to ourſelves.

This Kingdom hath had great Experience of the Mercies of God. The Deliverance we now remember was God's Work, and a Miracle of

of Mercy it was, and never to be forgotten. Our Deſtruction was determined by our Enemies, nor was it our Wiſdom that could foreſee it, nor in our Power to prevent it, had not God interpoſed for our Reſcue and Relief. We may ſay as the Apoſtle, *We had the ſentence of death in our ſelves, that we ſhould not truſt in our ſelves, but in God which raiſeth the dead, who delivered us from ſo great a death, and doth deliver. In whom we truſt that he will yet deliver us. If it had not been the Lord that was on our ſide, now may* [our] *Iſrael ſay; If it had not been the Lord, who was on our ſide, when men roſe up againſt us: Then they had ſwallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled againſt us. Bleſſed be the Lord who hath not given us a prey to their teeth.* We have had many Deliverances. *Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may* [our] *Iſrael now ſay, many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed againſt me.*

2 Cor. 1. 9, 10.

Pſal. 124.

Pſal. 129.

Our Holy Religion is the greateſt Bleſſing under Heaven, the indiſturbed Practice of it is a Mercy that we cannot over-value; in this Church we have it in its greateſt Purity. This great Bleſſing God hath preſerved to us after all Attempts to introduce Superſtition; we were

were going back into *Egypt* again, and all good Men had a ſad Proſpect of things: God raiſed up a Deliverer, and we are ſaved without our Fault, and beyond our Hopes: God fill our Hearts with a due ſence of this unvaluable Mercy, and grant we may never fall into the hands of cruel Men.

This is what *David* deprecates in the words of my Text, *Let me not fall into the hands of man.*

We are always beſt when we are in the hands of God, *For his mercies are great.*

If it be ſaid that God is ſaid to viſit the Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children unto the third and fourth Generation, this is of no Force againſt what hath been ſaid of the great Mercies of God. For this is ſaid (as *Maimon* well obſerves) only in the caſe of Idolatry where the Idolater may well be ſuppoſed to ſuffer in his Offspring to the third and fourth Generation, as well as to live and ſee ſo far. Beſides God is ſaid in the ſame place to ſhew Mercy unto thouſands of them that love him and keep his Commandments.

If

If it be ſaid that the Author of the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* affirms, that 'tis *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*: Yet neither will this be an Objection of any weight againſt what hath been ſaid, or againſt *David*'s Choice in my Text, when he ſays, *Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord*: For it is to be conſidered, that the Author of the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* ſpeaks of Apoſtates from the Chriſtian Religion, and he that falls thus, will fall heavily indeed, and find God a conſuming Fire. In this Caſe *there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which ſhall devour the Adverſaries.* This is of all the moſt dangerous Fall, it puts us out of the Hands of God's Mercy, and puts us in the Hands of his juſt Vengeance. *David* could not wiſh to fall thus, he chooſeth the Divine Chaſtiſement rather than the Sword of his Enemies; he had rather be corrected by God, than perſecuted by his Enemies. But nothing is ſo formidable as a falling from our Stedfaſtneſs, whether it be a total Apoſtacy from Chriſtianity, or from the Purity and Simplicity thereof, to the Super-

Heb. x. 27, 31.

ſtitions and vile Corruptions and Practices of the Church of *Rome*. We read of ſome who *received not the Love of the truth that they might be ſaved*. 2 Theſ. 2. 16. Theſe Men were ready to fall indeed into the hands of the living God. It follows, *For this Cauſe God ſhall ſend them ſtrong deluſions to believe a lye; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* God keep us from falling thus.

If we muſt ſuffer, may we ſuffer by God's hands, not by the hands of Men. We are ſure God will chaſtiſe us in meaſure, he will conſider our Frame and deſign our Amendment; he will accept of our Repentance, and not be deaf to our Cries; nor will he be angry with us for ever; he delights not in our Miſery, but had rather we ſhould turn and live.

On the other hand, if we fall into the hands of Men, we have no Security of Common Juſtice, much leſs of Pity and Compaſſion: *Magna pars hominum eſt quæ non peccati iraſcitur, ſed peccantibus.* Men are too often greater *Enemies* to our *Perſons*, than to our *Vices*.

Vices. They too often are governed by Humour and irregular Paſſions, by a blind and bitter Zeal, by violent Prejudices, and inveterate Bigottry, by Hatred and Malice, by Secular Intereſts and Regards. They too ſeldom allow for Humane Infirmities, and often make a wrong Judgment of the Merits of the Cauſe. They too often deſtroy the Innocent with the Guilty, and diſtinguiſh not between the Innocent and Obnoxious. *The Sword devoureth one as well as the other.* We can never be ſafe in ſuch hands. No wonder that *David* ſhould deſire to fall into the hand of GOD, and not into the hands of Men.

From all that hath been hitherto ſaid, I crave leave to draw ſome Corollaries, and Leſſons of Inſtruction. And they are theſe that follow:

Firſt, The neceſſity of obſerving inviolably the Divine Inſtitutions and Laws. The numbring of the People, whatever it were in itſelf, had its appendant Laws, which ought to have been obſerved: Herein lay the fault of *David*, that he neglected them. God

will not be mocked, we muſt keep to our Rule.

Secondly, We ſee what reaſon we have to pray for Kings, and all in Authority. 'Tis hard to ſay, whether it be more our Duty, or our Intereſt ſo to do. Their Actions have a great influence upon their People, whoſe Safety is often bound up in their good Conduct and Adminiſtration.

Thirdly, We may learn the Miſchief of Pride and Boaſting in our Preparations and our Numbers. God can ſoon defeat us if we do not intirely confide in him. This you have heard was the Caſe of King *David*, who was otherwiſe a Man after God's own Heart.

Fourthly, Here is an excellent Pattern to thoſe who have Dominion over others, of Tenderneſs and Compaſſion towards thoſe who are Subject to them. *David* is concerned for the Good of his People; he does not chooſe for himſelf only, but for his People, whoſe Safety he was greatly concerned for. This appears from his Choice in my Text, and from

from his Demeanour under the Hand of God. Thus we read what he ſaid unto God, when he ſaw the Angel that ſmote the People, *Lo* (ſays he) *I have ſinned, and I have done wickedly: But theſe Sheep what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be againſt me, and againſt my fathers houſe.* Ver. 17. Such was his Concern for thoſe who were committed to his Charge.

This one of the Ancients reckons the Property of a King; and he makes this the Difference between a King and a Tyrant; that the One governs by Fear, and hates his People, the Other purſues them with Beneficence and good Will. *Polyb. Hiſt.* Lib. 5.

Fifthly, We may learn hence the beſt way to ſecure the Divine Protection, *viz.* by keeping ſteaddy in our Obedience to the Divine Precepts and Inſtitutions. If we depart from this, we bring our ſelves into Straits and Difficulties. This was *David*'s Caſe, and this hath often come to paſs. The *Jews* have a Saying, That when Men ſhake off the Yoke of the Law, God puts them under the Yoke of the Kingdom. That is, when they forſake their

their Obedience he gives them up to the Hands of Men, to rule over them.

I add that we have here a great Pattern to imitate, I mean that of God's Mercy: And it becomes us to imitate him whom we worſhip. If God be merciful we ought to be ſo too: His Mercy to us all, does moſt powerfully commend to us the ſhewing Mercy to one another.

To Conclude,

We ſee what cauſe we have to offer up all poſſible Praiſe and Thankſgiving to Almighty God for the Deliverance we commemorate this Day, that he gave us not up into the hands of cruel and blood-thirſty Men, and that he ſtill preſerves us from them. *Oh that men would praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs and for his wonderful works to the children of men.* What ſhall we render to his Divine Majeſty for all theſe Mercies! Let us offer unto God Thankſgiving, and pay our Vows to the moſt High.

God

God hath done great things for us; let us do whatever we can for the Service of him; let us uſe all our Power to advance the Honour of his Name, and to bring others that are under our Care and Influence to do him Service. *He hath ſaved us from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us:* What have we more to do but to pray, *That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might ſerve him without fear, in holineſs and righteouſneſs before him all the days of our life.* Luk. 1. 71, 74, 75.

Which that we may do, and be bleſſed in our Deed; God of his infinite Mercy grant through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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